

THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNESS IN *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*¹

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Abstract: For more than a hundred years, the role of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* has been the centre of an enormous controversy among literary critics. In their approach to this work, critics have come up with a broad range of different interpretations, and, among them, two criticisms stand out: the so-called *apparitionists* and *non-apparitionists*, which from the very beginning have excluded each other, as their names contribute to suggest.

The present paper reviews those interpretations, based on their most representative critics and their excerpts from the book in order to contribute to an understanding between these two possible readings.

Keywords: Turn of the Screw, Governess, Apparitionist, Non-apparitionists, Bildungsroman, Henry James.

Título en español: El papel de la institutriz en *The Turn of the Screw*

Resumen: Durante más de un siglo, la crítica que ha abordado la novela *The Turn of the Screw* ha tratado de analizar y explicar los sucesos en ella relatados, dando como resultado un amplio abanico de interpretaciones. Entre estas destacan las interpretaciones denominadas *aparicionistas* y *no aparicionistas*, que desde sus inicios, y como sus propios nombres dan a entender, han sido excluyentes entre sí.

El presente artículo realiza una revisión de dichas interpretaciones, basada en sus críticos más representativos y los pasajes en que estas se asientan, para aportar un puente de unión entre ambas posibilidades.

Palabras clave: Vuelta de Tuerca, institutriz, aparicionistas, no aparicionistas, Bildungsroman, Henry James.

For more than a hundred years, the role of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* has been the centre of an enormous controversy among literary critics. In their approach to this work, critics have come up with a broad range of different interpretations, and, over the years, have radicalised their positions in the defence of each theory, each critical school trying to defend its turf.

The main body of criticism can be divided into two groups. On the one hand, the so-called *apparitionists* have defended a reading in which the governess's state of mind has little or no weight at all. They offer a more radical interpretation of the symbolism present in the characters, elements and events that take place in the story, so that the religious al-

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legory they support is free of any inconvenient psychic references to the governess's mind: "we can not account for the devil by treating the governess as pathological; we must seek elsewhere an explanation of the story's hold" (HEILMANN, 1960). Thus, the archetypal struggle between Good and Evil fits this theory better.

On the other hand, the so-called *non-apparitionists* have defended another reading in which the governess's mental state seems to be the only meaningful aspect of the whole work. They rationalise the governess's sexuality in excess by focusing on the psychoanalytic evidence "washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap" (GODDARD, 1960), so that all the *supernatural* phenomena vanish into thin air.

Under their shadow there lies a broad array of different theories, ranging from the governess's Marxism theory to sex-related theories that include homosexuality, bisexuality, or paedophilic attitudes towards the children. According to one theory Henry James is even accused of being a misogynist.

In most of these cases the literary theories *turn the screws* of interpretation. Since Edmund Wilson, Edna Kenton and Oscar Cargill established the grounds of the *non-apparitionist* theories and Robert Heilmann and Charles Hoffmann did the same for the *apparitionist* theories, each new contribution to either side seems to emphasise the differences between both approaches. Each theory tries to convince us that it is the only interpretation possible and, in order to prevail, attempts to tear the opposing theory to pieces.

This paper, however, seeks to draw a balance between both sides and provides a place where the governess's state of mind and the events that take place at the house of Bly can coexist together. Attention is drawn to several passages that up to now have gone unnoticed by the authors of these literary theories and new evidence is provided as an aid to an understanding of the *story beyond the story*.

Among other things, *The Turn of the Screw* stands out for its premeditated ambiguity. The lack of trustworthiness in its characters -and therefore, the events they relate- creates an atmosphere of fear and prevents the reader from making one-sided readings (RIMMON, 1977). The author himself drew attention to this elaborate ambiguity in the prologue to the New York edition, declaring that, personally, he did not endorse the governess's free interpretation of everyday events. Henry James states the necessity of incompleteness of the relationship of "certain figures and things" and establishes this necessity as an objective of the author (JAMES, 1992). Then, it is the author's duty to draw the "preemptive limits" in the form of a circle of "closure and authority" around any piece of work; an illusion that reveals its "fragile contingency" when pushed to the limits (TEAHAN, 2007; 17).

Thus, we should not search for a single, all-exclusive interpretation.

NON-APPARITIONIST THEORIES

The first critics that approached *The Turn of the Screw* focused almost exclusively on the role of the governess and her state of mind, leaving the subject of the wraiths to the *apparitionists*. These theories claimed that the governess had a medical condition and that her mental state made her see what did not exist in reality. They argued that this was the result of sexual repression caused by the social, personal and professional hindrances she had encountered during her life.

The young governess is the daughter of a clergyman who is hired to take care of the two little children at Bly. At the age of twenty, for the first time in her life, she leaves her father's house to work as a governess in a house belonging to others. "*I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship. Well, I was, strangely, at the helm!*" (ToS, 1994; 18).

These are difficult circumstances *per se* for anybody. Nevertheless, in the case of this young governess, we have to add a number of even more critical conditions. Oscar Cargill thinks the governess acts in image and likeness to the governess Lucy R., sent by her Presbyterian parents to Sigmund Freud's office on account of her unstable condition. Sigmund Freud explains her case in *Studien über Hysterie* (1895) and in several aspects they resemble each other (ESCH, 1999; 141).

From the very beginning, the governess behaves in an extremely irresolute manner, and she questions her choice to take charge of the house: "*I remember the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little see-saw of the right throbs and the wrong*" (ToS, 1994; 14).

She also tells Mrs. Grose that she fell in love with her employer the very first time she saw him, though she knows that love would be impossible due both her social background and the fact that her master would never appear in the house and take care of the domestic affairs: "*I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!*" (ToS, 1994; 17). In addition, the first night she spends in the house she is witness to a number of extraordinary phenomena. She recognised "*(...) the cry of a child (...) [and] before my door, a light footprint*" (ToS, 1994; 16). She also seems extremely shocked by the beauty of the children and wants to hug and kiss them all the time she is with them. She thinks the landscape and the house where she lives is the stuff of "*storybooks and fairy-tales*" (ToS, 1994; 18) where life was a *carpe diem*:

I learned something – at first, certainly – that had not been one of the teachings of my small, smothered life; learned to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of Summer and all the mystery of nature (ToS, 1994; 24).

This is a sign of an unstable and anxious mind that will become even more stressed by the forthcoming events (GODDARD, 1960). However, that does not mean that she is not a kind of spinster, as Glenn A. Reed states in *Another Turn on James's 'The Turn of the Screw'* (1949). The infatuation she developed for her employer seems to relate more to a platonic form of love than the sexual frustration of a woman hired to run a house that offers her no future either at a personal or professional level. As Edmund Wilson, Edna Kenton, Harold Goddard and others have argued, the governess's mind is of great relevance in the reader's attempts to unravel the events that take place in Bly, "[t]o understand the events we must evaluate the governess's evaluations, (...) we must evaluate the governess herself" (LYNDENBERG, 1960; 275). Nevertheless, it is a little premature to conclude that a sexually frustrated woman is the mere cause of every foolish act or unusual event that takes place in the house.

APPARITIONIST THEORIES

The characters of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are, of course, of great importance in the arguments put forward by the *apparitionists* and their presence is as important as that of the governess in these theories. They are presented as a couple of doomed wraiths, agents of Evil, who harass two little children and attempt to corrupt their Christian souls, while the governess, who personifies Good, stands up for them.

On the one hand, Peter Quint is portrayed as the 19th-century archetypal evil doer:

He has red hair; very red, close-curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight, good features and little, rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are, somehow, darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a good deal (ToS, 1994; 36).

This description is completed with clear references to the biblical snake, “[h]is eyes are sharp, strange— awfully; but I only know clearly that they’re rather small and very fixed. His mouth’s wide, and his lips are thin, and except for his little whiskers he’s quite clean-shaven” (ToS, 1994; 36); so that “*the coming of Quint is the coming of the snake into the little Eden that is Bly*” (HEILMANN, 1960). In the same way, his presence in the final scene “*filled the room like the taste of poison*” (ToS, 1994; 121) and he is accused of doing the “*work of demons*” (ToS, 1994; 69).

For her part, Miss Jessel is just as malignant as Quint. She was “*another person –this time; but a figure of quite as unmistakable horror and evil: a woman in black, pale and dreadful– with such an air also, and such a face!*” (ToS, 1994; 46); “[b]ut –yes– with extraordinary beauty (...) –very, very, I insisted; wonderfully handsome. But infamous” (ToS, 1994; 48). Some clues as to why she was expelled from the house are provided by Mrs. Grose, and all of them steer the reader towards a sexual impropriety between Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. The conversation between Mrs. Grose and the governess about the reasons why Miss Jessel left the house is clarifying enough:

*‘There was everything.’
‘In spite of the difference—?’
‘Oh, of their rank, their condition’ –she brought it woefully out. ‘She was a lady.’
I turned it over; I again saw. ‘Yes –she was a lady.’
‘And he so dreadfully below,’ said Mrs. Grose’* (ToS, 1994; 48).

Mrs. Grose goes on with these explanations, clearing up any doubts about the subject: “[s]he couldn’t have stayed. Fancy it here –for a governess! And afterward I imagined—and I still imagine. And what I imagine is dreadful” (ToS, 1994; 49). This observation, together with the allusion about Miss Jessel being “dishonoured”, seems to imply that she had become pregnant by Quint.

Historically, this has been read as a religious allegory in which forces of Evil clash with forces of Good, in the *paradisiacal* landscape of Bly, in order to secure the Christian souls *par excellence*, those of the innocent children. However, the absolute absence of references to what the governess sees, feels or portrays is the Achilles heel of these theories.

The intentions of the two wraiths cannot be explained as a simple sexual perversion since, as I will now try to show, there are several passages in *The Turn of the Screw* that may help clarify this point.

THE TURN OF THE SCREW AS A LEARNING PROCESS.

When we examine some of the different situations and places where the apparitions take place throughout the story, we are presented with a number of clues and references that seem to have gone unnoticed up to now.

The very first time Peter Quint appears before the young governess he is “*at the very top of the tower to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted me*” (ToS, 1994; 26). The tower has clear phallic connotations and psychoanalytic references, as Edmund Wilson reported in his study, which stress the sexual intentions of the apparitions. Moreover, it is a symbol of “*unbounded freedom and limitless control*” (COULSON, 2007; 185). But it also reminds the reader of the moment when Flora guides the newcomer governess through the house “*step by step and room by room and secret by secret [...] on the summit of an old machicolated square tower that made me dizzy*” (ToS, 1994; 18). This tower is the one Miles (the main player in the “secrets” Flora reveals to the governess) wishes to “ascend” the night he is caught by the governess in the garden outside the house. As the governess says, when she recalls that night, he “*turned it on me – the lovely upward look with which, from the battlements above me, the hideous apparition of Quint had played*” (ToS, 1994; 74). So, if the eyes are the window to the soul, through Miles’ and Quint’s eyes the governess is able to see into their very being, and they look like each other.

During Miss Jessel’s apparitions, there are sexual and psychoanalytical references as well. The femininity of the symbolism of the lake –equivalent to the masculinity of the symbolism of the tower, as well as the symbol of rebirth- is present the very first time the governess witnesses Miss Jessel’s wraiths. On the other side of the lake Flora plays a game:

[s]he had picked up a small flan piece of wood, which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat. This second morsel, as I watched her, she was very markedly and intently attempting to tighten in its place (ToS, 1994; 45).

The pieces of wood Flora is playing with not only have clear sexual connotations, as shown by her attempts to poke one piece of wood through the hole in the other, but they are also the means whereby she can sail to the other side of the lake and meet Miss Jessel. Neither Miles nor Flora fear the wraiths, in fact they want to be with them. And Flora successfully meets Miss Jessel later –that is, she is reborn *into* Miss Jessel-, when Miles deliberately distracts the governess by playing the piano so that Flora can leave the house and cross the lake:

Flora, a short way off, stood before us on the grass and smiled as if her performance was now complete. The next thing she did, however, was to stoop straight down and

pluck – quite as if it were all she was there for – a big, ugly spray of withered fern (ToS, 1994; 97).

The wraiths of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not an external threat to these children. Quite the contrary, they share a very deep relationship. They are a threat *within* the children.

The children, Miles and Flora, must be protected from the corrupting presence of Quint and Miss Jessel's wraiths, so that they can grow up unperturbed. For the reader, they are presented as unsullied creatures. Their angelic beauty and exquisite manners are echoed by the sunny weather enjoyed by everyone at Bly when the story begins. Thus, as the story develops and the children fall increasingly under the spell of the wraiths, they are disturbed at a physical and moral level. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the influence the wraiths have on them is an *external* moral corruption as the *apparitionists* argue. The corrupting influence comes from within and when it reaches the outside it takes the form of a physical and intellectual maturity.

Both Miles and Flora are delighted with the spring weather at Bly. The governess first introduces Flora to the reader: “[t]he little girl who accompanied Mrs. Grose appeared to me on the spot a creature so charming as to make it a great fortune to have to do with her” (ToS, 1994; 15). In the same way, the first impression the governess has of Miles is of a boy

in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had, from the first moment, seen his little sister. He was incredibly beautiful; (...) everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence, (...) his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love (ToS, 1994; 23).

The governess constantly refers to their physical appearance; Flora is “*extraordinary charm*” and “*most beautiful*” while Miles is “*incredibly beautiful*”. Both of them share an intrinsic “*beauty and amiability, happiness and cleverness*”. When this physical appearance turns out to be “*unnatural goodness*” and the mutation finally takes place (HEILMANN, 1960; 177), this constant emphasis on their beauty makes this realisation even more shocking. In fact, it is Mrs. Grose who first warns the reader when the governess asks if she has ever known the boy “*to be bad*”: “(he) *is no boy for me!*” (ToS; 1994; 21).

The narration continues through the summer and autumn and when the warmth and brightness of summer give way increasingly to the cold and darkness of winter. The external radiance of the children gradually vanishes, revealing their inner corruption.

As a result, the children gradually leave the “age of innocence” due to the influence of the wraiths, and as time goes by, they enter the “age of experience”. The governess thinks Flora “[i]s an *old, old woman*” when she knows the little girl has finally met Miss Jessel (ToS, 1994; 96). Right after this meeting, Mrs. Grose notices that “[i]t has made her, every inch of her, *quite old*” (ToS, 1994; 103), and Miles even asks the governess to allow him a higher degree of personal freedom since “(...) *alter all, I’m a fellow, don’t you see? that’s – well, getting on*” (ToS, 1994; 78).

Together with this gradual ageing process, an odd intellectual precocity appears:

(...) [t]hey got their lessons better and better, which was naturally what would please (Flora) most— in the way of diverting, entertaining, surprising her; reading her passages, telling her stories, acting her charades, pouncing out at her, in disguises, as animals and historical characters, and above all astonishing her by the “pieces” they had secretly got by heart and could interminably recite. I should never get to the bottom —were I to let myself go even now— of the prodigious private commentary, all under still more private correction, with which, in these days, I overscored their full hours. They had shown me from the first a facility for everything, a general faculty which, taking a fresh start, achieved remarkable flights. They got their little tasks as if they loved them, and indulged, from the mere exuberance of the gift, in the most unimposed little miracles of memory. They not only popped out at me as tigers and as Romans, but as Shakespeareans, astronomers, and navigators. (...) He was too clever for a bad governess, for a parson’s daughter, to spoil; and the strangest if not the brightest thread in the pensive embroidery I just spoke of was the impression I might have got, if I had dared to work it out, that he was under some influence operating in his small intellectual life as a tremendous incitement (ToS, 1994; 56).

Henry James portrays this passage to knowledge in a special way. Eric Savoy, in his study of *The Pupil* by Henry James, states that “there is no arbitrary distinction to be made between ‘ignorance’ and ‘knowledge’, which in any case do not stand in binary relation to each other” since “ignorance, at the instant one touched it, was already flushing faintly into knowledge” (SAVOY, 2007; 102-3). The tutor awakens the *knowledge* of his pupil and it is evidence for an external “hand” that triggers the passage from childhood to adolescence. In the same way, the governess knows Miles is no longer a child: “[h]is having lied and been impudent are, I confess, less engaging specimens than I had hoped to have from (Mrs. Grose) of the outbreak in him of the little natural man” (ToS, 1994; 54); that both children knew: “[w]hat it was most impossible to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw more —things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past” (ToS, 1994; 75); and that their knowledge came from the wraiths:

[i]t was extraordinary how my absolute conviction of his secret precocity (or whatever I might call the poison of an influence that I dared but half to phrase) made him, in spite of the faint breath of his inward trouble, appear as accessible as an older person —imposed him almost as an intellectual equal (ToS, 1994; 88).

This is why the governess no longer believes in “the absurdity of our prolonging the fiction that I had anything more to teach him” (ToS, 1994; 110). Heilmann believes that this is her confession that Miles “had eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge” and that he had to be expelled from paradise. Miles’s awareness of his sexuality (HEILMANN, 1960; 181) led to his being expelled from school too:

He had got out of me that there was something I was much afraid of and that he should probably be able to make use of my fear to gain, for his own purpose, more freedom. My fear was of having to deal with the intolerable question of the grounds of his dismissal

from school, for that was really but the question of the horrors gathered behind (ToS, 1994; 81).

The governess knows this as she had experienced the same fear herself, the night she entered his room to ask him why he had left the house late at night:

'Think me –for a change– bad!' I shall never forget the sweetness and gaiety with which he brought out the word, nor how, on top of it, he bent forward and kissed me. It was practically the end of everything. I met his kiss and I had to make, while I folded him for a minute in my arms, the most stupendous effort not to cry. He had given exactly the account of himself that permitted least of my going behind it (...) (ToS, 1994; 67).

As the wraiths' presence increases, the children begin to manifest a clear intellectual and sexual precocity, a moral ageing. This ageing is evocative, therefore, of the corruptive influence of the wraiths on the children, the corruption that the young governess feels she must fight.

As far as the governess is concerned, she is not insane. She is just extremely sensitive to her surroundings. From the landscape to the people around her, she has strong feelings about the environment in which she lives. As she says, all these peculiar events “*must have sharpened all [her] senses*” (ToS, 1994; 29); so that when any extraordinary or weird incident occurs –such as the sudden apparitions of the wraiths, which she describes as a “*flash of knowledge*” (ToS, 1994; 32)–, she feels these profound sensations, loses consciousness or suffers blackouts, as if she were in a trance.

The wraiths' apparitions are basic to an understanding of the governess and her inner conflicts. The very first time the wraiths of Quint appears, she feels that “*the place (...) had (...) become a solitude (...) It was as if (...) all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, (...) the intense hush in which sounds of evening dropped*” (ToS, 1994; 27). Right after his appearance for the second time on the other side of a window of the room in which she stood, she left the house in a rush to meet him, unsuccessfully. “*I almost dropped for the real relief of this*” she proclaimed, as well as the fact that she lost track of time: “*I can't speak to the purpose today of the duration of these things. That kind of measure must have left me*” (ToS, 1994; 32). She also describes the place as follows: “*the terrace and the whole place, the lawn and the garden beyond it, all I could see of the park, were empty with a great emptiness*” (ToS, 1994; 33). The governess enters a state of *altered consciousness* during her third encounter with Quint. Once more, she loses track of time and reality: “[t]he moment was so prolonged that it would have taken but little more to make me doubt if even I were in life” (ToS, 1994; 59). The first time she encounters Miss Jessel's wraiths she makes it clear that the relationship she is able to establish with the wraiths is beyond the reach of common mortals: “[t]he way this knowledge gathered in me was the strangest thing in the world (...) I began to take in with certitude, and yet without direct vision, the presence, at a distance, of a third person”, of whose identity “[the governess] was conscious –still even without looking–” (ToS, 1994; 43). She had never seen Miss Jessel, though she knew who she was. Of course, the environment surrounding the scene was far from normal: “*there [was] something more dire in this, I feel, than in anything I*

have to relate— I was determined by a sense that, within a minute, all sounds from her had previously dropped” (ToS, 1994; 44). When Miss Jessel disappears after her last successful encounter with Flora, the governess suffers a blackout from which she recovers “*at the end (...) of a quarter of an hour*” (ToS, 1994; 101), when

an odorous dampness and roughness, chilling and piercing my trouble, had made me understand that I must have thrown myself, on my face, on the ground and given way to a wildness of grief. I must have lain there long and cried and sobbed (...) (ToS, 1994; 102).

Finally, when the governess meets the wraiths of Quint in the final scene, she “*suffered for a minute from something that [she] can describe only as a fierce split of [her] attention*”, as a premonition that obliged her to move Miles away from the window where Quint once appeared. There he was again, the wraiths of Quint, on the other side of the window. This is the moment, precisely, when the governess has a new “revelation” about her capacities and what was going on there: “[t]he inspiration – I can call it by no other name– was that I felt how voluntarily, how transcendently, I might” (ToS, 1994; 117).

The premonitory skills of the governess are also revealed in her behaviour when the wraiths are present and by the prevailing atmosphere when they appear. Despite the paradisiacal situation she is immersed in, she still feels that “*it was a trap (...) to my imagination (...) to, whatever in me, was most excitable*” (ToS, 1994; 25) since her mind torments her about “*how the rough future (...) would handle them and might bruise them*” (ToS, 1994; 25). She also feels a portentous clearmindedness when she deduces that the wraiths are after the children in spite of the fact that they have only appeared to her (ToS, 1994; 39); and that “[i]t was confusedly present to [her] that [she] ought to place [herself] where he (Quint) had stood” when he appeared the second time (ToS, 1994; 33). She even confirms that she was right about how she interpreted the unnatural events that occurred in the house, when only a few things had happened as yet: “*in retrospect, (...) by the time the morrow’s sun was high I had restlessly read into the fact before us almost all the meaning they were to receive from subsequent and more cruel occurrences*” (ToS, 1994; 41). These feelings resumed when summer ended and a new atmosphere imbued the place. Renewed omens and premonitions from her short-term memories emerged: “[t]here were exactly states of the air, conditions of sound and of stillness, unspeakable impressions of the kind of ministering moment (...) I recognized the signs, the portents –I recognized the moment, the spot” (ToS, 1994; 73). She also feels how her “*sensibility had, in the most extraordinary fashion, not declined but deepened*” (ToS, 1994; 73) after the short time they enjoyed without any disturbing apparitions. One of these new feelings concerns the governess herself, furthermore. One night, while she kept vigil at Miles’ bedside, she looked down from the top of the staircase and

(...) recognized the presence of a woman seated on one of the lower steps with her back presented to me, her body half-bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands. I had been there but an instant, however, when she vanished without looking round at me (ToS, 1994; 62).

This scene is the premonition of what would happen in the house a few days later, when she came back from the church, determined to leave the house as soon as possible:

[t]ormented, in the hall, with difficulties and obstacles, I remember sinking down at the foot of the staircase –suddenly collapsing there on the lowest step and then, with a revulsion, recalling that it was exactly where more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women (ToS, 1994; 82).

The way she realises the real intentions of the wraiths towards the children is also very revealing. Flora is playing with some pieces of wood, trying to stick one through a hole in the other. “*My apprehension of what she was doing sustained me so that after some seconds I felt I was ready for more. Then I again shifted my eyes– I faced what I had to face*” (ToS, 1994; 45). She had no doubt that Flora was already under Miss Jessel’s influence, and this was shown by the games she played: “[i]t was a pity to be obliged to reinvestigate the certitude of the moment itself and repeat how it had come to me as a revelation that the inconceivable communion I then surprised was a matter, for either party, of habit” (ToS, 1994; 51).

I consider that the reactions and the behaviour of the governess are helpful not only to gain an understanding of her mental processes and her capacities, but also to define the real nature and aims of the wraiths she was able to perceive. It is well-known that Henry James made use of a large number of reports from the American branch of the British *Society for Psychical Research* as source material to write *The Turn of the Screw*. From them he took the *modus operandi* of the wraiths, what makes them different from the archetypal ghosts and spirits present throughout the gothic literature of that time (ESCH, 1999; 135). The governess uses and toys with these ideas during the second apparition of Quint, when she mentions that “*he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up*” since “*the window, though the dining room was on the ground floor, not going down to the terrace on which he stood*” (ToS, 1994; 32). Is this the usual kind of wraiths in gothic literature? Has this wraiths blurred legs or none at all? Or is it the window that blocks the view and therefore, he is no wraith at all? The answer to this is provided in the third of his apparitions, when the governess declares that “[h]e was absolutely, on this occasion, a living, detestable, dangerous presence” who appeared full-length: “*the thing was as human and hideous as a real interview: hideous just because it was human*” (ToS, 1994; 59). In fact, during this encounter “[i]t was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters that gave the whole horror; huge as it was, its only note of the unnatural” (ToS, 1994; 59). This time Quint did not even leave the place as a wraiths would, vanishing into thin air. He just walked “*straight down the staircase and into the darkness in which the next bend was lost*” (ToS, 1994; 60).

Whatever *appears* in the house, it is not a wraith wandering in sorrow, in search of the Christian soul of a child. The governess’s mind is not free from fault, either. Goddard said in his lectures that “*the appearance of the ghosts is timed to correspond not at all with some appropriate or receptive moment in the children’s experience, but very nicely with some mental crisis in the governess’s*” (GODDARD, 1960; 268). These crises are in no

way related to the hysteria of neurasthenia but to the governess's sensitivity to these events, forbidden to the rest of the inhabitants of the house, as Goddard himself appreciated in his lectures. This extreme sensibility is the quality that allows her to confront the corrupting presence of the wraiths in order to ensure that the children grow up in safety.

CONCLUSIONS

The governess's awareness of the wraiths is not a result of her eyesight or their ability to appear to whomever they want. It is a *sixth sense*, whether she is aware of it or not, that allows her to *see* the wraiths. However, they do not pose a specific threat, such as sexual perversion. The threat they represent is a more general one. They are the harbingers of evil not on earth but in the human soul. Peter Quint is the archetypical 19th-century evil doer, and Miss Jessel is the archetypical pale, beautiful and dishonoured woman in mourning: the *femme fatale*.

The children's intentions to willingly meet Quint and Jessel, the mutual identification of Miles and Quint and Flora's success in meeting Miss Jessel show us that the relationship between the children and the wraiths is much deeper than that. It is no accident that Quint is meant for Miles and Miss Jessel for Flora; the wraiths are the incarnation of an evil force that lives within the human soul. It is part of the children.

The wraiths of Quint and Miss Jessel are a seed that exists within each child. These seeds sprout in the form of the children's sexual and intellectual precocity. Henry James does not resemble William Blake in his portrayal of moral or ethical corruptions as an external force. Children are not innocent lambs for their own sake; the seed of evil lies within their souls, in the duality of the human soul. The governess has to fight to prevent the shoot that finally emerges from bearing a Quint or a Jessel.

The author impregnated the story with ambiguity so that all the possibilities coexist together and none of them prevails. However, both the *apparitionists* and the *non-apparitionists* disregarded Henry James' first directive on how to approach *The Turn of the Screw*. The events happen truthfully, but the interpretations the governess deduces from them are at stake (James, 2004). In other words, the governess's mind does not make up any of the incidents; what she relates in her diary really happens. But the interpretations she infers are by no way definitive, since they are part of the story.

The *apparitionist* theories successfully decode the novel in terms of an allegory. Beyond it lies the archetypal dramatisation of the struggle between Good and Evil in which the former is represented by the governess and the latter by the wraiths. They fight for the Christian souls of the little children. However, these theories fail to accommodate the governess's mental processes in their interpretation. Their interpretation offers only a one-sided version of the events that take place in the house.

In the same manner, the *non-apparitionist* theories provide an effective account of governess's internal affairs, but, as a result of their refusal to consider the wraiths and their influence on the plot, their approach is biased and lacks a certain critical objectivity. The presence of Quint and Jessel's wraiths in the story is unjustifiably diverted from the core of the criticism and left for psychoanalytic purposes only, when they are crucial in order to get to the bottom of the story beyond the story in *The Turn of the Screw*.

The major elements that form the main body of literary criticism of this novel are susceptible to a wide range of interpretations and for this reason the reader can not reach a single, all-exclusive interpretation of the events described. In addition, several of the events ignored in these major theories contribute to an interpretation that does not unjustifiably exclude any passage that does not suit this.

From the very first moment, the governess is shown to be a young, impressionable woman with a certain lack of assuredness as well as a special sensitivity. Nonetheless, this does not mean she is a hysterical or neurasthenic case, as Goddard, Wilson or Kenton, among others, have supported. This sensitivity involves a special receptiveness to the strange events at Bly, which have “sharpened her senses” and, in this way, allowed her to feel what nobody else in the house can. It is that *sixth sense* that enables her to see the wraiths.

As far as Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are concerned, they are not what they seem. The governess herself reveals their real nature and literally denies they are wraiths. She is fully aware of what they really are and it is not a precise or explicitly evil power such as a corruptive sexual -or homosexual- force. Quint represents the archetypal 19th-century evil doer, while Miss Jessel represents the *femme fatale*. The explanations about an inappropriate relationship between them, together with the sexually implicit elements in the settings in which they appear, reveal that their motivations are intrinsically related to sexuality. Contrary to what the *non-apparitionist* theories infer from that, the children are not threatened in any way as they are meant to be *felt* by the governess and not by them. It is a message to their instructor, about what Miles and Flora might become in the future.

Regarding the children, Miles and Flora, they are introduced to the reader as two creatures of almost perfect beauty and manners. These are accompanied by continuous religious references that imply that their inner beauty is in harmony with their outer appearance. Yet, as summer gives way to winter, the experience of life darkens their alleged beauty. When the wraiths put in an appearance at Bly, the children begin to manifest these changes: they are symbolised by a certain inner ageing and great intellectual precocity. The religious references about how they gather their *knowledge*, as the *apparitionist* theories have argued, entail a sexual awakening as the corruptor of their souls. Contrary to the typically *Miltonic* manner, these evil forces are not sent by Satan to plague the Garden of Eden. They reside in every human soul and form part of it, and the governess is meant to fight it.

The children make their way in life and few things are so terrifying. The path splits into two and each one ends up in a different way: they can grow up as normal youths or the seed can sprout in the form of a Quint or a Jessel. The governess –closer in age to the children than to the adults–, as her platonic love shows, is aware of this and feels the duty to intervene in their development so that she can help them on their way to adulthood.

In this sense, the role of the governess places *The Turn of the Screw* closer to a Bildungsroman, such as *The Catcher in the Rye* (J.D. Salinger, 1951), than to any work by Hawthorne or Milton, as many *apparitionist* critics argue. As Holden Caulfield fights the elements to preserve the innocence of her sister from adulthood’s phoniness, the governess fights tooth and nail against the disturbing elements which threaten the innocence of her protégés.

The death of Miles, which is portrayed as the symbolic end of his tribulations, supports this theory. A fast rereading of the opening chapter allows us to understand that Douglas is none other than Miles. In that chapter, while introducing the story to his friends, Douglas gives us enough facts about the governess and himself to support it:

She was a most charming person, but she was ten years older than I. She was my sister's governess," he quietly said. "She was the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she would have been worthy of any whatever. It was long ago, and this episode was long before. I was at Trinity, and I found her at home on my coming down the second Summer. I was much there that year –it was a beautiful one; and we had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden– talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice. Oh yes; don't grin: I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me, too. If she hadn't she wouldn't have told me. She had never told anyone. It wasn't simply that she said so, but that I knew she hadn't. I was sure; I could see (ToS, 1994; 9).

The difference in age, his opinion about her, the reason why she was hired, the time when he arrived home and when he met her... all this information is a perfect match with Miles' story. Besides, he says she was in love with someone the story would not reveal, what is sarcastically answered by some of the guests: "[w]ell, if I don't know who she was in love with, I know who he was" (ToS; 1994, 10). Douglas even lets it drop that this might be so, when he speaks about the governess's crush: "[t]hat came out –she couldn't tell her story without its coming out. I saw it, and she saw I saw it; but neither of us spoke of it" (ToS; 1994, 9). Thus, the duality of the child's soul is underpinned, as, in addition to the evil half represented by Quint there is the other half, the good half, represented by a brave, frank *Duke of Douglas* -portrayed by William Shakespeare in his work *Henry IV*, as Oscar Cargill first argued (CARGILL, 1963).

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